

We should pursue initiatives that truly make health care an option for all. Such initiatives should drive down costs by increasing competition and transparency, reforming medical malpractice, making health insurance portable, promoting pooling options for small businesses, and giving States greater flexibility in how they deliver their services.

Dr. Sergio should have better certainty for his business, and all small business people should have better certainty for their future. His employees should have a better health care system, as should all Americans. These are the goals we need to reach.

We should strive for a system that puts individuals squarely in charge of their health care and doesn't discourage Americans from working and improving their earnings. That is the American dream Dr. Sergio's father sought to achieve when he started his business 36 years ago. That is the dream we should pursue. Yet we are hampered in doing that by the onerous regulations, taxes, and stipulations imposed by the health care law passed by one party without any input from the opposing party, and famously labeled as something we would need to learn about after it was passed. That was probably the most telling statement by a Member of Congress—in this case the former majority leader and then-Speaker of the House of Representatives—about something that was shoved down America's throat without any bipartisan support whatsoever.

Now, yes, if it had been read before it was passed, we could have avoided all of this. It could have been debated and people could have looked for a bipartisan way of moving forward to provide health care for the uninsured and to ensure the health care plan they imposed would not have these negative effects. That is what should have happened. It didn't. We now have a chance to rectify that. We have a chance to remedy that. We are waiting for a Supreme Court decision before we go forward with an alternative to what has cost us in terms of jobs and all the costs to small businesses in terms of their ability to grow.

That is a part of the American dream. We have denied that under this health care program, and I am hoping my colleagues will join us as we look to address this very important issue—important not only for the health of the American public but important for the growth of our economy.

Mr. President, with that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold his suggestion?

Mr. COATS. The Senator will be happy to do just that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

PROMOTING UNITED STATES INTERESTS IN THE INDO-ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to talk about an amendment I have filed to the National Defense Authorization Act, amendment No. 1708.

This amendment would require the President to submit a comprehensive strategy within 120 days to promote U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region. This language or similar language was already placed in the House version of the fiscal year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act.

The amendment would assure that the U.S. Government is effectively marshaling resources and employing a whole-of-government approach to implement an effective, multifaceted engagement policy in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

This region will be vital to U.S. national interests for generations to come, and the administration's Asia pivot or rebalance policy was intended to reflect that. This is something the administration has talked about for years, this Asia rebalance or Asia pivot. But currently, the administration does not seem to have such a comprehensive strategy or approach that seamlessly incorporates U.S. military, diplomatic, and commercial activities to make the rebalance an effective policy.

In April of 2014, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a report stating that U.S. Government agencies "have not substantially prioritized their resources to increase engagement in the Asia-Pacific region." In fact, if we look at U.S. foreign military assistance, I believe it ranks somewhere around 4 percent of spending. If we look at the Bureaus, this region we are addressing, hopefully through the Asia pivot and rebalance, receives about 1 percent or so of funding, depending on how we measure it. In fact, it is last among the Bureau funding.

Last month, at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced a new initiative that envisions a boost in U.S. military assistance over the next 5 years to enhance maritime security efforts with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. This effort is a welcomed step forward but alone is not enough.

These initiatives cannot take place in a vacuum. Department of Defense efforts need to be more effectively wedded with other efforts of U.S. Government agencies into a coherent and comprehensive strategy of assistance and engagement in the region. In light of the shared threats in the region, this lack of a comprehensive policy sends the wrong message to our allies throughout the region.

The amendment will ensure that Congress is a genuine partner to the administration's effort to implement this important effort. I ask my colleagues to support this amendment.

One of the challenges we have seen going forward, of course, in the Asia-Pacific region is—as we talk about Asia balance, as we talk about a pivot—our day-to-day attention seems to be more and more drawn to the Middle East, rightly so. But our long-term interests lie in Asia and these regions that we are trying to negotiate a Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement with. Hopefully, the House will pass trade promotion authority later this week, and we can begin to work in earnest on ideas that represent our commitment through the Asia pivot or Asia rebalance.

I am concerned that we have talked a lot of good talk and we have put together some fancy rhetoric and put a pretty good label on our foreign policy efforts as it relates to the Asia Pacific, but what we haven't done is actually followed through. While I commend Secretary Carter for his efforts and commitment, we can't just stop there. We must make sure we are doing everything we can to grow our opportunities in this region through an Asia pivot or Asia rebalance that truly does need reenergizing.

One of the best ways to help a rising China truly become a great nation is to make sure it is abiding by the norms and standards of acceptable international behavior. We have talked before about the challenges we have—from violations of intellectual property rights and cyber theft. In fact, five PLA officers have been indicted. President Obama has put forward an Executive order listing possible sanctions on cyber threats. We know that if we can start avoiding these kinds of bad behaviors when we start engaging Asia and our neighbors and friends throughout the region, the region we will be dealing with through the Trans-Pacific Partnership—it is my hope we can truly bring this amendment through the National Defense Authorization Act to bring coherence and clarity to the rebalance strategy we have talked about but so far have not been the best in our execution.

COLORADO'S WESTERN SLOPE

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I wish to talk a little bit about what is happening on Colorado's Western Slope this morning.

Several weeks ago, a judge in Denver, CO, ruled that a permit was improperly given to a mine known as the Colowyo mine on the Western Slope in Northwestern Colorado. This lawsuit was brought, I think, some 8 years after this permit was granted. Mine employees number around 220 people on Colorado's Western Slope. It is critical to the region's economy, and it is critical to the economy of Craig, CO. Without these employees and without this mine, it will truly be an economically devastating moment in Western Slope history.

So I hope the Department of the Interior will pay attention to the multiple